

חומש קורן
THE KOREN HUMASH

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

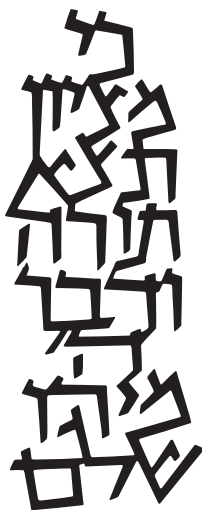
FIRST EDITION



THE MAGERMAN EDITION

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Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל

KOREN PUBLISHERS JERUSALEM

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The Magerman Edition

First Hebrew-English Edition, 2025

Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd.

POB 4044, Jerusalem 91040, ISRAEL

POB 8531, New Milford, CT 06776-8531, USA

www.korenpub.com

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Hebrew Text of Tanakh © Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd. 1962, 2025

English translation and commentary of Torah © Estate of Jonathan Sacks,
2021

The publication of this book was made possible
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Hardcover, ISBN 978-965-7844-86-1

Printed in PRC

First printing

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We have been blessed in our lives, by virtue of our philanthropic endeavors, to meet some of the most amazing and beautiful souls in the Jewish world. The pinnacle of those blessings was the time we shared with Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and his wife, Lady Elaine Sacks.

As a part of the project to support the new translation of the Tanakh, along with Rabbi Sacks' new translation of and commentary on the Humash, we were blessed with the opportunity to spend a few *Shabbatot* with Lord and Lady Sacks, to hear Rabbi Sacks speak in our community, and to have him spend time celebrating *hagim* with our community's children at school events. Learning from Rabbi Sacks is a privilege and a pleasure he has shared with the world through his publications and public speaking. Spending time with Rabbi Sacks – the man, the beautiful *neshama* – is more rare, and those experiences we had with him in our home and in our community, at Shabbat meals and on Shabbat afternoon walks, are priceless experiences we will never forget.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks was the authentic Torah voice for our generation, simultaneously steeped in Torah tradition and deeply engaged with people of all faiths. He succinctly understood and eloquently conveyed both the particular Jewish identity of our sacred writings as well as their universal relevance.

We pray that this unique, traditional, painstakingly researched and annotated translation of and commentary on the Humash enlivens Torah for *klal Yisrael*, unites us in our traditions, inspires us with new, and old, ways of thinking, and ultimately brings us closer to the Redemption.

Debra and David Magerman
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE
THE KOREN H̄UMASH

The publication of the new *Koren H̄umash* with commentary by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a time of celebration, but one that is bittersweet. Its publication close to his fifth yearzeit is a reminder that his living presence is no longer with us, but also that his Torah lives on and continues to grow in influence. Rabbi Sacks' enthusiasm, joyful scholarship, erudition, and penetrating insight permeated all his writings, conveying to us and to future generations that our Torah is a limitless source of wisdom, faith, and moral clarity. We were well into this ambitious endeavor when he went into hospital, from which he fully expected to return.

I cannot write a preface for him; no one can. But his many books on H̄umash – the *Covenant & Conversation* series, and those exploring leadership, ethics, spirituality, life-changing ideas, and belief – speak for themselves. These works, alongside his astonishing range of books, articles, and lectures – all of which have marshalled to complete Rabbi Sacks' commentary – reveal the depth, breadth, and relevance of the Torah's messages for the current age. The Torah is, as the Rabbis teach, “betrothed” to the Jewish people; yet it also contains the blueprint for a healthy and holy society that has universal relevance. Rabbi Sacks was our guide through the bewildering thickets of modernity, our guide to a fresh and refreshing engagement with Torah, and we gratefully follow the path he has charted for us.

His passing leaves a void which no one in this generation fills. We hope these writings will engage, provoke, and inspire the next generation of Torah scholars, teachers, laypeople, and indeed all God-seekers.

✪ In the best of circumstances, the creation of this H̄umash would be a collaboration of many. It is my privilege to thank them.

This project, the sister project of *The Koren Tanakh* which was published two years ago, has been sponsored by our friends Debra and David Magerman of Philadelphia and Jerusalem. With continual encouragement and no lack of patience, they shared the vision that animated both Rabbi Sacks and Koren, and enabled us to create this work you hold in your hands. For my colleagues at Koren, we thank you; for the many future

generations who will read and use this *Ḥumash* weekly, we are forever in your debt.

We thank the family of Rabbi Sacks, Lady Elaine Sacks and her children Joshua, Dina, and Gila, for their encouragement and commitment, particularly after his passing. The leadership of The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, its chief executive, and my friends, Joanna Benarroch and Alan Sacks, provided encouragement during the awful days of 2020 and 2021, when we felt leaderless, and they continue to be valued and cherished partners.

Jessica Sacks' scholarship and erudition is not simply hereditary but unique to her, and she engaged with her uncle's writings with compassion and dedication. Rabbi Reuven Ziegler oversaw the entire project, and Dayan Ivan Binstock of the London Beth Din reviewed the *Ḥumash*.

Management of the editorial side was led by Gila Chitiz and Ashirah Firszt, and the production and design side was led by Rabbi Avishai Magence and Caryn Meltz; the typography was designed by Esther Be'er and Tomi Mager. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Joel B. Wolowelsky for the initial commentary drafts; Rabbi Julian Sinclair, Yaffa Aranoff, Dr. Yoel Finkelman, and Tani Bednarsh for their review and comments; Debbie Ismailoff and Ita Olesker for copyediting; Rabbi Yedidya Naveh for authoring and translating the haftara commentary; Tali Simon, Doron Chitiz, and Avichai Gamdani for proofreading; Eliyahu Misgav for the cover design; and Gila Chitiz, Tani Bednarsh, and Elchanan Spitz for creating a database of books, essays, articles, and broadcasts of Rabbi Sacks.

✪ Rabbi Sacks taught: "In Judaism we not only learn to live; we live to learn. In study, we make Torah real in the mind so that we can make it actual in the world." We pray that this masterful commentary on the Torah will allow countless people to ascend to ever greater heights in *living* and *learning*, to internalize the Torah's relevance to the individual and to society, and to help heal our fractured world.

Matthew Miller, Publisher
Jerusalem, Tishrei 5786 (October 2025)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Rabbi Sacks intended that this Humash be his flagship project, one in which he could incorporate many of his timeless messages and ideas. “Traditional commentaries,” he wrote of the Haggada, “are usually close readings of individual words and phrases rather than reflections on the meaning of the whole. That is a classic Jewish response, and I have not hesitated to do likewise.... But it is the great themes, the overarching principles, that are often neglected or taken for granted.” These great themes – freedom and responsibility, love and justice, the meaning of the covenant between God and humanity and God and Israel – were for Rabbi Sacks the lifeblood of Judaism, and their text is the Torah as we read it week by week.

After translating the Humash for *The Koren Tanakh*, Rabbi Sacks began writing his commentary, beginning with the book of Exodus. Regretfully, he was unable to see it to completion. The Humash editorial team at Koren, led by Rabbi Sacks’ niece Jessica Sacks, compiled the rest of the Humash commentary from his vast array of books, articles, commentaries, and lectures. The work was always done with Rabbi Sacks’ intention for the Humash commentary as our guiding light, mission statement, and purpose. Great care was taken to present his invaluable ideas and messages in his own words, only adapting and reshaping them to preserve his style in the new format. We pray that we have managed to bring Rabbi Sacks’ words alive through the Torah and his dream project to fruition. May this work allow his beautiful Torah to enlighten and inspire all of us for generations to come.

Haftarot

Following the Humash section are the haftarot according to the various customs of the Ashkenazim, Sepharadim, Yemenites, and Chabad. Chabad follows the Ashkenazi custom unless indicated otherwise. We included a short commentary for each haftara, originally written in Hebrew by Rabbi David Nativ (for Koren's Humash Yisrael) and translated by Rabbi Yedidya Naveh. The commentary for the special haftarot was composed especially for this volume by Rabbi Yedidya Naveh. We hope that these commentaries provide the reader with the context to appreciate the significance of the words of the prophets and their depth and timeless teachings.

בראשית

GENESIS

and how we should behave (ethics). But it does so in a way quite unlike the philosophical classics from Plato to Wittgenstein. To put it at its simplest: Philosophy is *truth as system*. Genesis is *truth as story*. It is a unique work, philosophy in the narrative mode.

So we learn about what exists by way of a story about creation. We learn about knowledge through a tangled tale of the first man, the first woman, a serpent, and a tree. We begin to understand human freedom and its abuse through the story of Kayin. We learn how to behave through the lives of Avraham and Sara and their children. It is this that has helped to make Tanakh the most widely read and influential book in the history of civilization. Only the gifted few can fully understand a philosophical classic, but everyone can relate to a story.

Everyone can understand Genesis, yet not understand at the same level; that is another feature of the book. Each of its stories has layer upon layer of meaning and significance, which we only grasp after repeated readings. Our understanding of the book grows as we grow. Each age adds insights, commentaries, and interpretations of its own. The book's literary style allows it to be read afresh in each generation. Only stories have this depth, this ambiguity, this principled multiplicity of meanings.

Torah is God's book of humanity, and each of us is a chapter in its unfinished story. Its words form our covenant with Heaven. And as we listen and respond, we add our voice to the unbroken conversation between the Jewish people and its destiny.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Genesis, the book of Bereshit, is as its name suggests, about beginnings: the birth of the universe, the origins of humanity, and the first chapters in the story of the people that would be known as Israel. It tells of how this people began, first as an individual, Avraham, who heard a call to leave his home and begin a journey, then as a family; it closes as the extended family stands on the threshold of becoming a nation. The journey turns out to be unexpectedly complicated and fraught with setbacks. In a sense, it continues till today. This is part of what makes Genesis so vivid. We can relate to its characters and their dilemmas. We are part of their world, as they are of ours. This is our story; this is where we came from; this is our journey.

But this is not all Genesis is. Rambam makes the fundamental point that *reshit* does not mean “beginning” in the sense

of “first of a chronological sequence.” For that, Biblical Hebrew has other words. *Reshit* implies the most significant element, the part that stands for the whole, the foundation, the principle. Genesis is Judaism’s foundational work, a philosophy of the human condition under the sovereignty of God.

This is a difficult point to understand, because there is no other book quite like it. It is not myth. It is not history in the conventional sense, a mere recording of events. Nor is it theology: Genesis is less about God than about human beings and their relationship with God. The theology is almost always implicit rather than explicit. What Genesis is, in fact, is *philosophy written in a deliberately non-philosophical way*. It deals with all the central questions of philosophy: what exists (ontology), what can we know (epistemology), are we free (philosophical psychology),



PARASHAT BERESHIT

- ¹ ² When God began creating heaven and earth, the earth was void and desolate, there was darkness on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved over the waters.
- ³ ⁴ God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. God

Parashat Lekh Lekha, does it narrow in on the particular. As far as Plato was concerned, knowledge starts with the particular – this tree, this person; looking at these you begin to realize that what is interesting is not this tree but tree-ness, not this person, but the universal things that make a person a person. Following Plato, Western thought has not been interested in the particular or parochial. It considers truth to be universal and eternal or not truth at all. Judaism is structurally unique – it is the only world religion ever to believe in a universal God, the God of all peoples, times, and places, and at the same time to believe in a particular way of life that not all people have to follow, because there is more than one way to find God. The structure we see in Genesis – first universal, then particular – recurs repeatedly in our prayers and our thought. It is a basic form of the Jewish mind.

LET THERE BE...

Just as God is called gracious, so you be gracious. Just as He is called merciful, so you be merciful. The prophets described the Almighty by all the

various attributes: long-suffering, abounding in kindness... powerful, and so on – to teach us that these qualities are good and righteous and that a human being should cultivate them, and thus imitate God as far as we can. (*Hilkhot Deot* 1:11)

Implicit in the first chapter of Genesis is a momentous challenge: Just as God is creative, so you be creative. What is more, it tells us how to be creative – namely, in three stages. The first is the stage of saying, “Let there be.” What is truly creative is not science or technology per se, but the word. Because we can speak, we can think and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists. Creation begins with the creative word, the idea, the vision, the dream. The first stage in creation is imagination.

The second stage is for us the most difficult. “And there was...” It is one thing to conceive an idea, another to execute it. Between the intention and the fact, the dream and the reality, lies struggle, opposition, and the fallibility of the human will. It is all too easy, having tried and failed, to conclude that nothing ultimately can be achieved, that the world

פרשת בראשית

א בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ אֲדָמָה
 הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וּבְהוֹ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת
 עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי־אֹר וַיְהי־אֹר: וַיֵּרָא

BERESHIT

The Book of Books starts with the beginning of beginnings: the creation of the universe and life. The story is told from two different perspectives, first as cosmology (the origins of matter), then as anthropology (the birth of humanity).

The first narrative (Gen. 1:1–2:3) emphasizes harmony and order. God creates the universe in six days and dedicates the seventh as a day of holiness and rest. The second (2:4–3:24) focuses on humanity, not as a biological species but as persons-in-relation. God fashions man, sees that “it is not good for man to be alone” (2:18), and then fashions the woman. The serpent tempts them; they sin and are banished from the garden.

From then on, the human drama unfolds as tragedy. Kayin murders his brother. By the end of the *parasha*, God sees “how great man’s wickedness was upon the earth” (6:5) and “regretted that He had made man on earth” (6:6). God creates order; man creates chaos. The question that remains to challenge us is: which will prevail?

1:1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים *When God began creating* – Rashi begins his commentary: “Rabbi Yitzhak said: The Torah should have

begun with the verse “This month shall be to you the beginning of months’ (Ex. 12:2), which was the first mitzva given to Israel.” To understand a book, one needs to know to which genre it belongs. What Rashi is succinctly saying in his enigmatic question is that the Torah is not a book of history, even though it includes history. It is not a book of science, even though the first chapter of Genesis is the necessary prelude to science, representing as it does the first time people saw the universe as the product of a single creative will, and therefore as intelligible rather than capricious and mysterious. The Torah is, first and last, a book about how to live.

Rashi gives one answer to his question. I would suggest an additional one. Jewish ethics is not confined to law. It includes virtues of character, general principles, and role models. It is conveyed not only by commandments but also by stories. And so the book of how to live opens with the most fundamental question of all. As the psalm (8:4) puts it: “What are mortals, that You should be mindful of them?”

1:1 אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ *Heaven and earth* – The Torah begins with the universal, and only later, in chapter 12,



saw the light: it was good; and God separated the light
 5 from the darkness. And God called the light “day,” and the
 darkness He called “night.” There was evening, and there
 was morning – one day.
 6 Then God said, “Let an expanse stretch through the

justice, compassion, faithfulness, loving-kindness, the dignity of the individual, and the sanctity of life.

1:4 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ *God separated the light from the darkness* – “I am the LORD; there is no other, forming light, creating darkness, making peace, creating evil” (Is. 45:7). The first act of creation inspired the single most emphatic rejection of dualism in the Bible. Dualism is the view that there is not one force operative in the universe but two: a force of good and a force of evil. Evil, in this worldview, comes not from God but from an independent force: Satan, the Devil, Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, and the many other names given to the force that is not God but is opposed to Him and those who worship Him. This idea, which has surfaced in sectarian forms in each of the Abrahamic monotheisms, as well as in secular totalitarianisms, is one of the most dangerous in all of history. It divides humanity into the unshakably good and the irredeemably evil, giving rise to a long history of bloodshed and barbarism of the kind we see being enacted today in many parts of the world in the name of holy war against the greater and lesser Satan. Dualism is not monotheism, and the Sages, who called it *shetei reshuyot*, “two

powers” or “two domains” (Berakhot 33b), were right to reject it utterly. In the words of historian Jeffrey Russel, dualism “denied the unity and omnipotence of God in order to preserve His perfect goodness.” Further, it allows people to commit “altruistic evil”: evil committed in a sacred cause, in the name of high ideals. Dualism resolves complexity. But monotheism requires the ability to handle complexity. God who creates light brings back the darkness also. “There was evening, and there was morning – one day.”

1:6 וַיְהִי מְבִדִּיל *Let it separate* – The narrative of creation is tightly structured. For three days, God creates domains – light and dark, sea and sky, sea and dry land. Order is a matter of distinction and separation; the verb *lehavdil*, to separate and divide, appears five times in Genesis 1. For the next three days, He populates those domains with their appropriate contents: the sun, moon, and stars; fish and birds; land animals and man. The seventh day, the Sabbath, is the apotheosis of creation: an enduring symbol of the world at peace with itself and its maker, the first thing in the Torah to be called holy.

אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם כִּי־טוֹב וַיְבַדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאָדָם וּבֵין
הַחֲשֹׁךְ: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם לְאָדָם וְלַחֲשֹׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה
וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רְקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין

is as it is, and that all human endeavor is destined to end in failure. Yet Judaism holds the opposite, that though creation is difficult, laborious, and fraught with setbacks, we are summoned to it as our essential human vocation: “It is not for you to complete the work,” said R. Tarfon, “but neither are you free to desist from it” (Avot 2:16). There is a lovely rabbinic phrase: *Ma’hashava tova HaKadosh barukh Hu metzarefa lemaaseh* (Tosefta, Pe’ah 1:4). This is usually translated as “God considers a good intention as if it were the deed.” I translate it differently: “When a human being has a good intention, God joins in helping it become a deed,” meaning, He gives us the strength, if not now, then eventually, to turn it into achievement. If the first stage in creation is imagination, the second is will.

Finally: “God saw...it was good.” This is the hardest of the three stages of creation to understand. But Genesis makes clear that to see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act. There may be some few individuals who are inescapably evil, but they are few. Within almost all of us is something positive and unique but which is all too easily injured, and which grows only when exposed to the sunlight of someone else’s recognition and praise. To see the good in others and let them see themselves in the mirror

of our regard is to help someone grow to become the best they can be. “Greater,” says the Talmud, “is one who causes others to do good than one who does good himself” (Bava Batra 9a). To help others become what they can be is to give birth to creativity in someone else’s soul. This is done not by criticism but by searching out the good in others, and helping them see it, own it, and live it.

“God saw...it was good” – this too is part of the work of creation, the subtlest and most beautiful of all. When we recognize the goodness in someone, we do more than create it; we help it become creative. This is what God does for us, and what He calls us to do for others.

1:4 כִּי־טוֹב *It was good* – *Tov*, “good,” is a moral word. The Torah in Genesis 1 is telling us something radical. The reality to which Torah is a guide (the word “Torah” itself means “guide,” “instruction,” or “law”) is *moral* and *ethical*. The question Genesis seeks to answer is not “How did the universe come into being?” but “How then shall we live?” This is the Torah’s most significant paradigm shift. The universe that God made and that we inhabit is not about power or dominance but about *tov* and *ra*, good and evil. For the first time, here, religion is ethicized. God, we are told, cares about



7 water; let it separate water from water.” So God made the
 8 expanse, and it separated the water beneath the expanse
 9 from the water above. And so it was. God called the
 10 expanse “heavens.” There was evening, and there was
 11 morning – a second day.
 12 Then God said, “Let the water beneath the heavens be
 13 gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And
 14 so it was. God called the dry ground “earth,” and the
 15 gathered waters He called “seas.” And God saw: it was
 16 good. Then God said, “Let the earth produce vegetation:
 17 seed-bearing plants and trees of all the kinds on earth
 18 that grow seed-bearing fruit.” And so it was. The earth
 19 produced vegetation: plants bearing seeds, each of its
 20 kind, and trees bearing fruit containing seeds, each of its
 21 kind. And God saw: it was good. There was evening, and
 22 there was morning – a third day.
 23 Then God said, “Let there be lights in the heavens’
 24 expanse to separate day from night and to serve for signs
 25 and seasons, days and years. They shall be lights in the
 26 heavens’ expanse, shining upon the earth.” And so it was.
 27 God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule
 28 by day and the lesser light to rule by night – and the stars.

work of His hands’ (Is. 5:12). How do we know that it is one’s duty to calculate the cycles and planetary courses? Because it is written, ‘For this will be your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the peoples’ (Deut. 4:6). What wisdom and understanding is in the sight of the peoples? Say, that is the science of cycles and planets” (Shabbat 75a).

The Sages attached religious dignity and integrity to science, both as human wisdom and as an insight into the divine wisdom evident in the cosmos. The Babylonian Talmud sees the study of

astronomy, for those who are capable of it, as a religious duty. There is a blessing to be recited on seeing “one of the sages of the nations of the world.” For the Sages to institute a blessing – a religious act of thanksgiving – over Greek and Roman scholars showed a remarkable open-mindedness to wisdom, whatever its source. The heavenly bodies are intended not just to exist, but also as “signs” to be studied, to help us navigate in time and space. Rambam sees science as a way to the love and awe of God.

א מִים לְמִיִּם: וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַדְּרָקִיעַ וַיְבַדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם
 אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לַדְּרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לַדְּרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־
 בֶּן: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַדְּרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם
 שְׁנִי:

ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד
 וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבְשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים וַיִּבְרָא אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
 וְלִמְקוֹה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר
 אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי
 עֵשֶׂה פְרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוּבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן: וַתֵּצֵא
 הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה־פְרִי אֲשֶׁר
 זֶרְעוּבוּ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר
 יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:

ג וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹדֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין
 הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וַהֲיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנָיִם:
 ד וַהֲיוּ לְמְאֹדֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַאֲיִר עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:
 ה וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹדֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמְּאֹד הַגְּדֹל
 לְמַמְשְׁלֹת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמְּאֹד הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשְׁלֹת הַלַּיְלָה

1:12 *Each of its kind* – The key recurring word is *leminehem*, *lemino*, *lemina*. God creates plants, animals, birds, fish *leminehem*, according to their different kinds. The essence of Genesis 1 is ordered diversity. This is the priestly way of seeing the world, one which we will see expressed most clearly in the book of Leviticus. For the priest, the moral life is something we learn by honoring the distinctions God has taught us to see in the structure of reality. There is milk, a sign of life, and meat, a sign of death. There is plant life and there is animal life.

There are brothers and others. Each has its boundaries that must be respected. That is sacred ontology and it creates an ethic of holiness. Its theoretical foundations lie here in Genesis 1.

1:14 *To serve for signs and seasons* – Nature is something we can observe and learn from. “He who knows how to calculate the cycles and planetary courses, but does not, of him Scripture says, “[They] feast... never once turning to look at the LORD’s workings, never once noticing the



- 17 God set them in the heavens' expanse to shine upon the
 18 earth, to rule by day and by night and to separate light
 19 from darkness. And God saw that it was good. There was
 evening, and there was morning – a fourth day.
- 20 Then God said, “Let the water teem with swarms of
 living creatures, and let birds fly over the earth across the
 21 heavens' expanse.” So God created the great sea serpents,
 and all the kinds of crawling, living things that swarm in
 the water, and all the kinds of winged, flying creatures.
- 22 And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying:
 “Be fertile and multiply and fill the waters of the seas, and
 23 let flying creatures multiply on earth.” There was evening,
 and there was morning – a fifth day.
- 24 Then God said, “Let the land produce every kind of living
 thing: all the different species of cattle, crawling things,
 25 and wild animals of the earth.” And so it was. God made
 the different kinds of wild animals of the earth, and cattle,
 and all the species of creature that creep upon land. And
- 26 God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let us make
 humankind in our image, our likeness, that they may
 rule over the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of

and fleas and gnats, they too are part of the creation of the world. Through all does the Holy One, blessed be He, make manifest His mission, even through the serpent, even through the gnat, even through the frog. (Bereshit Rabba 10:8)

Biodiversity is a source of wonder to the psalmist: “How many are Your works, LORD. You made them all in wisdom; the earth is full of Your creations” (Ps. 104:24).

1:22 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֹתָם *God blessed them* – God's first blessings are not addressed to

Adam, but to animals. Rambam warns us against an anthropocentric view of reality. “The universe does not exist for man's sake, but each being exists for its own sake and not because of some other thing” (*Guide for the Perplexed* III:13). To be sure, humanity with its unique capacity for moral choice is the focus of the Torah's concerns, but Genesis sets forth a view of nature which is not man-centered – but God-centered.

MAN IN GOD'S IMAGE

Genesis 1:26–27 is not so much a metaphysical statement about the nature of

י' וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים: וַיִּתֵּן אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאָרֶץ
 י"ח עַל-הָאָרֶץ: וְלַמַּשָּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין
 י"ט הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם
 רְבִיעִי:

כ' וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שְׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף
 כ"א עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם: וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-
 הַתַּיִנִּים הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שְׂרְצוּ
 הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵיהֶם וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף כְּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים
 כ"ב כִּי-טוֹב: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-
 כ"ג הַמַּיִם בַּמַּיִם וְהָעוֹף יִרֶב בָּאָרֶץ: וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם
 חַמִּישִׁי:

כ"ד וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וּרְמֵשׁ
 כ"ה וַחַיֵּית-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן: וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיֵּית הָאָרֶץ
 לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינָהּ
 כ"ו וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ
 כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרְדוּ בְדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-

1:21 *The great sea serpents* – In Ugaritic mythology, the god of the sky does battle with the god of the sea, a “great sea serpent,” and out of his victory establishes dry land, usually over the dead body of his victim. But in Genesis there is no myth. God speaks and the universe comes into being. Genesis 1 is the beginning of the end of the mythic imagination. No longer is the universe seen as unpredictable. It is the work of a single, rational creative will. This is what will make science possible: science was born when people stopped telling stories about nature and instead observed it. Nor is the God of Genesis – as were the gods of myth – at

best indifferent, at worst actively hostile to human beings. Genesis speaks of a God who endows humanity with His image. Thus, science and monotheism come hand in hand. We need science to understand the universe, and we need religion to guide our way within it, from the world as it is to the world as it ought to be.

1:21 *All the kinds of crawling, living things* – God delights in diversity. The Rabbis sensed it when they said:

Even those creatures you hold superfluous in the world, such as the flies

